1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

2

Toward us came Tenye, a young friend of last year, and two small boys. She had seemed but a child the year before when she had danced bandamba with the other little girls while the men were getting ready for the Kromanti dance. But now she looked quite grown, and instead of the small apron she had worn, was wearing a cloth of a woman.

"You've grown, Tenye."

"*Ay, a kisi bobbi kaba*," one of the youngsters said. "She has her breasts already," and he went on to say that soon she would marry. "Two moons more," he said, showing two fingers.

"You will soon have many bracelets, Tenye, and when you dance you will be splendid."

"Ai," the boy went on speaking eagerly, "Abane will teach us how to dance when he comes back. He went to the French shore. Abane made Tenye, and he made me, too. I am Yamati, and he made Sabape, here." But they had not the same mother, nor did they live in the same village. "When I grow up," the child went on, "I will dance with seed rattles at my ankles. I will dance like Abane." The rattles his uncles would have to buy for him, or when grown he might buy them for himself, but his father would give him his gods when he was of age, and good dancing, too, was a thing of the gods.

"Who will get Abane's seed rattles, Tenye? Will you get them because you are the oldest child of the first wife?"

"Ah, no!" both she and the indomitable Yamati exclaimed at the same moment, and then both lowered their heads and would say no more, while the small Sabape looked away.

Now we had the year before discovered why we were so often met by young and old with the phrases, "I do not know," or better still, "*Massa Gadu sabi*—God alone knows," when it was evident that the speakers knew the answer very well indeed. The reason lay with the will of the G'an Yorka, or the G'an Zombi, or the Nana, as the ancestors are variously called. The ancestors it seemed had long

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"It hurts, doesn't it?"

"*Ma kye!* It is beautiful. The men like it too much," said the girls in a chorus, laughing at the suggestion that the pain of the cuts would deter them from having them made.

Sometimes, of course, the older girl admitted, the wounds did become ugly. There was the girl from Godo, whose suitor had kept bringing her more gifts because she was growing handsomer and handsomer. She was all but ready for marrying, when one of her thighs became infected after the cuts. The wounds were so ugly that she could not even wear the tunics of the grown girl. The family was sacrificing to all the spirits of the earth, begging them to heal the wounds.

7

These days there were many visitors in the Granman's village. There was the girl the Granman had summoned to dance for his guests. She had, perhaps, that very summer got her cloths, and her reputation as the best dancer on the river had won for her a suitor who gave her many armlets and anklets. Her voice was fresh and flutelike in quality, and so fine that when she sang she placed a folded cloth over her mouth, or danced with her head low. This was the way of modesty before people, and humility before the gods.

The women said, "Her spirits dance well," when they watched her.

There was the large girl from a village down river who came almost daily. She had the body of a woman, yet she went about unclothed, and sometimes she appeared only with a string about her waist.

"She is ready for *pangi*—cloths—ai," the women said, "but her people do not want to give them to her yet."

They would not explain, however, why the attire of a grown woman was denied her. We could only conjecture about it. Perhaps she had no suitor. The man to whom she had been promised might have died. There might be other reasons.

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"Perhaps the women were wrong. She may not be a woman yet."

"*Ma kye!*" Angita exclaimed. It seemed he knew better.

And there was the woman Amasina. She wore as many armlets and anklets of brass as the shy dancer, as many as the wife of the bassia of S'ei, whom the gods had prospered. Her cloths were of the finest, and in colors which were most often of yellow and blue stripes, with a thread of black interwoven, and another of twisted red and white. She was good-looking, but in her manner there was no smoldering challenge and no undue reserve. With ease she went from one group to another, and the women treated her neither with too much familiarity nor with restraint.

Amasina felt at ease, too, with the white people. In the bush they had an explanation for this feeling of well-being with strangers. If a man and a woman were both born on the same day, they did not get on very well together, for they were both apt to have the same powers to grasp things which came within the province of the gods who also had come into the world on that day. Such a man and woman would at once perceive each other's mistakes or would be given to speaking continual warnings to each other. But there were days which were especially congenial affinities for marriages, and even friendships. These, we were led to see, were days which represented a male and female deity in the Bush Negro pantheon, whose mating had brought well-being to themselves and the living world.

"You and Amasina like each other, ai," they said in the village, and this friendship had a sequel of importance for us.

One late afternoon we were sitting with the women talking about the gods. Dida said the white on her body was for her god Kesekia. Chief And'u had washed her for her god when he was here in the village, and tomorrow she would dance. Kesekia, she said, was a Vodu god, who had come to her from the French shore. When he came to her, he spoke tongues; he knew French.

"Tomorrow they will play the agida drum, and I will put a kerchief on my head tied so," she said, showing how she

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866 461 434 made for sale, the guardian gives him a small sum outof the money gained. At 14 an adolescent begins to satisfy nearly all his own needs.

For example, from June to December, 1956, Taa (14 883 465 years), son of Fintiman (Boniville) had earned about 13 000 francs:

June	helped his father build a large boat for the administration (45 days)	6,000
October	went to Saint-Laurent as auxiliary bossman .	3,000
December	helped convoy a boat of the border-fixing mission sent back empty to Maripasoula . .	4,000
		13,000

882 868 His father, entrusted with his education, let him use this money in his own way; he pointed out to us with pride that for the first time in 1956 his son had been able to satisfy all his own needs, but that it was important to keep him under a fum hand until he was capable of doing a man's work alone: for hat, five or six years of apprenticeship would not be too much.

868 561 [153] [582] [178] In fact, many times we had the chance to verify it, it is in this prolonged apprenticeship that are developed the seriousness of mind and the technical skill so remarkable among the Refugee Blacks. At 20 years, most of them still do not know how to do anything worthwhile, and it is scarcely before 25 or 27 that they become capable of /134/ painstaking work; in this respect the present tendency of the young boys toward precocious emancipation (the marriage age of men is going down to 20 and even 18 years) runs the risk of having very unfortunate consequences for the future of the Refugee Blacks.

429 [582] [583] The person charged with the education of a girl exercises the powers of a mother toward her. It is she who authorizes her to marry, and by giving her the pāngi, married women's garment, gives her symbolically her freedom as a woman. It is to her that the first husband pays the price of the virginity of the girl.

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582 Generally speaking, the custom of the Refugee Blacks used to consider as immoral the marriage of a very young girl to an old man, or of a very young boy to an adult woman. 588 178 The weakening of family morals is clearly demonstrated by two events which happened during the summer of 1960. A boy of thirteen and a half, K... of Boniville, left his guardian to join an Assisi woman, A..., 20 years older than he and with a very bad reputation to boot; some months later his example was imitated /146/ by a boy of 14 who began living with a [684] [613] woman of 29. Nothing like that had ever been seen, and people inveighed against the scandal of it; but in both cases, guardians and lineage heads showed themselves incapable of making their authority respected by force.

882 [562] Marriage of girls. It can still be said (although things are in the process of changing rapidly) that girls, kweyi umã, occupy a place apart in the thought of the Refugee Blacks; the reprobation which embraces women does not extend to them. 882 834 [291] People say that girls "have good manners," and in fact most of them, although naked except for a little apron, have a reserved attitude, a becoming bearing, which contrast with the attitude of the married women. To tell the truth, this virtue is not so much due to natural inclinations as to the strict [593] vigilance with which their mothers surround them. The mothers literally do not let them out of their sight and permit no man to speak to them out of their presence. "Until dawn, until the cock crows, she keeps vigil," says the song, alluding to the mother who watches over her daughter's virtue. If a girl [836] [579] comes to lose her virginity without being properly married, pɔti na ɔsu, "established in a house," it is a dishonor for her mother and her near relatives.

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882 [858] Whereas little girls before puberty are left free to come and go, older girls are the object of constant surveillance. They are always under the surveillance of one of their near [883] relatives specifically designated. If they have permission to go dancing in another village, they must present themselves upon arrival to an uncle, an aunt, an older brother who will watch over them all evening.

Sometimes they build for a girl a little house where she sleeps alone ... but she is double-locked into it for the night.

[883] At nightfall, when their mothers are busy with the preparation of the meal, the girls are sent to get water or to angle for fish; there is wavering in the surveillance, and seducers know how to profit by it.

[593] [584] [582] Until recent times girls were held by their mothers in the bonds of a strict authority, and although engaged very young, they were not authorized to marry before reaching complete physical development.

584 It often used to happen that a girl might be promised by her mother to a man from her first years (they still say, although that is no longer practiced, pɔti mɔfu na umã, "to put his mouth on a girl," meaning by that to have received a promise of marriage). This plan always used to remain subject to the girl's assent, when she grew up and did not constitute a contract, strictly speaking; it did not involve any payment or compensa- [593] tion whatever. A girl could not be obligated to a marriage which was absolutely displeasing to her, but the mother's authority was great enough to make these marriages come about in most cases.

[431] If a girl had not been promised, the young man who wanted to marry her used to try to attract her attention during a dance and to exchange a few words with her. /147/ Later he would give her a paddle bearing symbols of fecundity and the representation of a house and a boat. If the girl accepted the paddle, he could propose to her officially.